

MEMORIAL DAY.

WORDS SPOKEN IN BLOOMFIELD,
MAY 30th, 1888,

By Rev. Ezra D. Simons.

A Christian civilization makes provision for an abiding place where we may lay our dead; a place which, journey where we will, remains a centre of our thoughts, and a shrine of our hearts; and whether, as time passes, we look forward with increasing earnestness as our own possible resting place when we go the way of all the earth, and our feet are checked from life's journeying and our hearts are still in the dreamless slumber. Well, indeed, is it that friendship should have so sacred a place to which we turn in the hour of death, in the fellowship of life's experiences passed within the veil. We come to the tomb as to the partings of the curtain which trembles as with the intrepid mysteries, and yet is bright with the revelation which shines through the scarcely concealing folds. If all the fellowship of life prompt us to give a fair place.

SET APART AS THE CITY OF THE DEAD: if warm affection in its tearful sense of bereavement, here under the sunlight and overarching trees, and beneath the green shade of the cypress, the simple ways and hallowed forms of kindred, and carefully tended the loved spot—surely patriotism may not be content save as it finds for its heroes a fit resting place.

The Nation has located near the great hospitals, those whose beneficent walls sheltered it from the war's woes, and the sick its convalescents, a spot which is more than a field of battle-stroke or fever-shaft—who in all ways perished in their country's service. And in ground, over which sped in hour of confusion and smoke the death-winged missiles of war, have been lowered, with all the honors of battle, those who were bruised and mangled in every part of the earth. But it is well that in our home cemetery there should be assembled side by side in burial those who in former time moved in the same ranks of army service.

As here we are now gathered, so over ground where warriors once moved in the clash and conflict of arms, hangs the peaceful air. The hoarse notes of strife have ceased. Only the ground bruised in the lingering graves; only the lines of earth, fast sinking to the common level, tell which of years ago and more men were drawn up in battle array, with banners flying and cannon in place; only the fragments of shell found on the surface or the battered bullet with which the soil was planted, as the seed of a better harvest of liberty and nationality—only such things tell of the strife which has been waged and suffered through woods and glens and up hillsides and over swift streams. Yet the graves of our dead warriors in our home cemetery—which never echoed the notes of actual strife—are linked, in historic association and honor, to the fields where were fought the battles of the Republic, and where were won its triumphs.

AN EQUAL SACREDNESS, THEN: COMING TO CONGRATULATE you finally today that your service is coming into be recognized in acts of State and Town, and whose valor and sacrifice and suffering must claim large attention before the Nation until all is rendered to you and yours that is your just due. I congratulate you that you were permitted to serve your country in the ranks of those who exposed their lives for the right. And Providence cast its decision in favor of the cause represented here today.

THE VETERAN BANKS ARE THINNING. How many have passed away since the war closed? The demand on brain, and heart, and nerve, was so intense through the strain of war that vitality soon ebbed when the excitement passed. Our comrades in the ranks have fallen like the leaves of autumn; and our great leaders, the leaves of spring. The last to fall were those who had the world coming today of the improved health of the brilliant, gallant and triumphant Sheridan. May his years on earth be multiplied for the comfort of his kindred and the honor and well-being of the Republic. Over the flower-strewn graves of our comrades we extend the warm hand of fraternal sympathy towards the suffering hero at our Nation's capital.

THE SOLDIER'S RECOMPENSE. Coming to congratulate you finally today that your service is coming into be recognized in acts of State and Town, and whose valor and sacrifice and suffering must claim large attention before the Nation until all is rendered to you and yours that is your just due. I congratulate you that you were permitted to serve your country in the ranks of those who exposed their lives for the right. And Providence cast its decision in favor of the cause represented here today.

"THEIR LIES A SOLDIER OF THE REPUBLIC!" In fresh beauty, with the coming spring comes the remembrance of those who have given their lives for their country, and those with whom they served the Nation in its hour of peril. I do not overlook the thoughtful kindness which prompts today the gift of a soldier's plot in this fair cemetery. Bloomfield would fain do honor to these men who once wore the blue, and to those, our comrades, who have dropped out of the ranks in life's journey, and have given their lives in a noble cause. That in the act those who have given this ground have discharged a solemn obligation, which every instinct of patriotism has bound upon them. Did our fathers in the olden time purchase this land with their blood? Those whom I represent today, living or resting under the silent mound of this place of sepulture, have by their heroism and sacrifice,

PRESERVED THE LAND TO YOU INTACT, made by their valor and suffering doubly "the land of the free and the home of the brave." Here, in this cemetery, are resting the heroes of our country, and above their heads you have inscribed their names. As you come bither year by year to renew the tokens of your remembrance and honor by planting the "colors" above them, formed of a nation's ensign, and by scattering flowers with which this day thy hands do deck the graves of the hero dead. So shall it be so long as the flag for which you fought floats above home of the living and grave of the dead. Soon, soon, our pulseless hands and sightless eyes shall find a place, it may be, on the spot where we are now gathered. So, too, shall your sons and daughters shall above us in sure token of their affection which shall forever break the spell of life's winter, and the night of earth shall give place to the morning amid whose dawning was shall melt forever from the nations and the world. Meanwhile, be our names, if need be forgotten, and our forms be laid in unmarked graves on land, or under the wide sky, and let us rest so that the principles for which we contended, shall live and strengthen and widen—and north and south be knit together in a fellowship as broad and firm as that of the sky which binds above both, and imbeds the stars reflected in the banner floating over one land and one people. Amen!

ONE AFTER WHOM THIS POST IS NAMED. The graves billowing the land—so far as the knowledge of grieved ones at home is concerned—are as blank as the waves of the heaving sea. But those who were bereaved of friends lying in your cemetery are able to mark the place of their hero dead. Of these you will today say:

"Better the pale, dead faces—
Than the living, pale-faced—
Better the lips cold silence—
And the mute, unbroke rest:
The grave is an unconquer'd tower,
The cup be worn out, and gall
Better the silent coming—
Than the living, pale-faced."

Shall I call the roll today of your hero dead resting in this hallowed ground? It is needless! As you move about among these graves you will find the muster-roll rolls traced in letters of stone. If you speak their names as at rollcall the silent answer comes, "Here, here, with arms at rest." And then with a smile of sympathy over these "tombstones" as declaiming not only, "Here," but pointing as with white finger heavenward, and saying also "There." Beside all the others whose names might well be mentioned

AND MENTIONED WITH TRUE HONOR, here lies Captain Amzi S. Taylor, who having served his country well, at last bowed in personal contrition before his country's God and passed with hope in Christ into the hereafter's heaven. And here lies Captain Robert S. Stoddard—beautiful model of man whom I shared in more than one battle, and of whose valor I was a personal witness, when the storm of death throbbed above and around us. It is with peculiar interest that I think of him today, and it is with intensified fervor that I take part in the exercises of the day, here in this cemetery, that only this week was I permitted to visit the scene of his death, and of so many thousands of our countrymen (Chancellorsville! The Wilderness!) Spottsylvania, with "bloody angle" Petersburg, with its crowded memories—from June '64, to March '65—all along that long line from Deep Bottom to Hatcher's Run on the South; and onward, at last, to Appomattox; how the places live in thought, and how people are they with the men and scenes of other days!



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